

SUBCHAPTER A—GENERAL

PART 600—ORGANIZATION

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SOURCE: 62 FR 16659, Apr. 8, 1997, unless otherwise noted.

§600.1 General.

(a) The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was authorized by the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103-354, 7 U.S.C. 6901 note) and established by Secretary's Memorandum 1010-1 (2.b.6), *Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture*, to provide national leadership in the conservation, development, and productive use of the Nation's natural resources. Such leadership encompasses soil, water, air, plant, and wildlife conservation with consideration of the many human (economic and sociological) interactions with these resources. NRCS is the Federal agency that works with landowners on private lands to help them conserve their natural resources. NRCS employees are highly skilled in many scientific and technical specialties, including soil science, soil conservation, agronomy, biology, agroecology, range conservation, forestry, engineering, geology, hydrology, wetlands science, cultural resources, and economics. NRCS was formerly the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) which was established by the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 (Pub. L. 74-46, 49 Stat. 163 (16 U.S.C. 590 (a-f))). NRCS has responsibility for the three major areas covered by SCS—soil and water conservation, natural resource surveys (soil surveys, resources inventory, snow surveys, and water supply forecasting), and community resource protection and management (watershed projects, river basin studies and investigations, resource conservation and

development areas, land evaluation and site assessment, and emergency watershed protection)—the Wetland Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Farmland Protection Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Forestry Incentives Program.

(b) The NRCS organization consists of a National Headquarters located in Washington, D.C.; six regional offices; 50 state offices and equivalent offices in the Caribbean Area and the U.S. Trust Territories of the Pacific Basin Area; approximately 2,500 field offices and 300 specialized offices; 28 plant materials centers; eight national centers; and eight natural resources institutes. NRCS is headed by a Chief who reports to the USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment.

§600.2 National headquarters.

(a) *Chief.* The Chief, with assistance of the Associate Chief, is responsible for administering a coordinated national program of natural resource conservation; planning, directing, and coordinating all program, technical, and administrative activities of NRCS; developing policies and procedures; correlating NRCS conservation programs with other agencies; accepting departmental leadership for programs for other activities assigned by the Secretary of Agriculture; and serving as Equal Employment Opportunity Officer for NRCS.

(b) *Deputy Chiefs.* Four deputy chiefs assist the Chief as follows:

(1) *Deputy Chief for Management.* The Deputy Chief for Management is responsible for management services, operations management and oversight, human resources management, civil rights employment, financial management, information technology, administrative support (providing a coordinated administrative management program for National Headquarters activities), special projects, and controlled correspondence. This deputy chief is also responsible for the activities of

three national centers: Business management, information technology, and employee development.

(2) *Deputy Chief for Programs.* The Deputy Chief for Programs is responsible for conservation operations, watershed planning, wetlands restoration, community assistance, resource conservation and development, USDA program outreach, civil rights program compliance, budget formulation and analysis, and international conservation.

(3) *Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment.* The Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment is responsible for soil survey, resource inventory, and resource assessment and strategic planning. This deputy chief is also responsible for the activities of two national centers: soil survey and cartography and geospatial.

(4) *Deputy Chief for Science and Technology.* The Deputy Chief for Science and Technology is responsible for the ecological sciences, conservation engineering, institutes, and resource economics and social sciences division. This deputy chief is also responsible for the activities of three national centers (water and climate, soil mechanics, and plant data) and eight institutes. This deputy chief, working closely with the deputy chiefs for Management and Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, provides overall direction for the National Science and Technology Consortium.

(c) *National Science and Technology Consortium.* The consortium consists of four divisions, three centers, eight technical institutes, and several cooperating scientists under the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology; two divisions and two centers under the Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment; and three centers under the Deputy Chief for Management.

(1) *Centers.* The eight centers provide specific products and services that maintain and enhance the technical quality of the agency. The centers are: water and climate, soil mechanics, plant data, soil survey, cartography and geospatial, information technology, business management, and employee development.

(2) *Institutes.* The eight institutes are: soil quality, natural resources inven-

tory and analysis, grazing lands technology, social sciences, watershed science, wetlands science, wildlife habitat management, and information technology. The institutes acquire, develop, and transfer needed technology in special emphasis areas so field employees can better serve their customers. The institutes often establish partnerships with other Federal agencies, universities, and public and private organizations.

(3) *Cooperating Scientists.* Cooperating scientists work in the areas of soil erosion and sedimentation, air quality, and agroforestry. These scientists are located at various universities and research centers.

(d) *Legislative Affairs.* The Legislative Affairs Staff provides coordination and assistance to the Chief on legislative affairs issues and activities.

(e) *Conservation Communication.* The Conservation Communication Staff is responsible for communications, volunteer programs, conservation education, and public affairs activities.

(f) *Strategic Natural Resource Issues.* The Strategic Natural Resource Issues Staff is responsible for coordinating priority strategic issues as determined by the Chief.

§ 600.3 Regional offices.

Each regional office is under the direction and supervision of a regional conservationist. Regional offices direct, coordinate, and integrate all phases of NRCS programs and activities, and address the total natural resource needs of the region. Regional offices are located in Beltsville, Maryland; Atlanta, Georgia; Fort Worth, Texas; Madison, Wisconsin; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Sacramento, California.

§ 600.4 State offices.

Each office is under the direction and supervision of a State conservationist. Each State conservationist is responsible for NRCS programs in a State. The Pacific Basin Area Office, under the direction and supervision of a director, serves the U.S. Trust Territories in that area. The Caribbean Area Office, under the direction and supervision of a director, serves the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Directors of the Pacific

Basin and Caribbean areas have the same responsibility and authority as a State conservationist. All references to State conservationist in this chapter include the directors of the Pacific Basin and Caribbean areas.

§ 600.5 Area offices.

Each area office is under the direction and supervision of an area conservationist or assistant State conservationist for field operations who is responsible for NRCS activities in the geographical area served by the area office. Usually the geographical area includes multiple field offices and counties. Many area offices now consist of teams working on a watershed or other geopolitical basis.

§ 600.6 Field offices.

Each field office is under the direction and supervision of a district conservationist who is responsible for NRCS activities in the geographical area served by the field office. Usually the geographical area of a field office includes one or more conservation districts and one or more counties. Field offices are generally collocated with other USDA agencies in USDA Service Centers.

§ 600.7 Specialized field offices.

Other field offices serve specialized activities, such as watershed protection and flood reduction projects, construction projects, resource conservation and development areas, and soil survey activities. Direction and supervision of these offices are designated by State conservationists.

§ 600.8 Plant materials centers.

Plant materials centers (PMC) assemble and test plant species for conservation uses. Usually a PMC serves two or more States, and is under the jurisdiction of the State conservationist where the center is located. Each PMC is directed and supervised by a manager who is responsible to a State office specialist/manager who is responsible to a State office specialist/manager as designated by the State conservationist.

PART 601—FUNCTIONS

Sec.

601.1 Functions assigned.

601.2 Functions reserved to the Secretary of Agriculture.

601.3 Natural disaster assistance.

601.4 Defense responsibilities.

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SOURCE: 62 FR 16660, Apr. 8, 1997, unless otherwise noted.

§ 601.1 Functions assigned.

The Natural Resources conservation Service (NRCS) is the Federal agency that works with private landowners to conserve their natural resources. NRCS employees help land users and communities approach conservation planning and implementation with an understanding of how natural resources relate to each other and to people—and how human activities affect those resources. The agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based assistance, partnerships, and cooperative problem solving at the community level. The mission of NRCS is to work on the Nation's non-Federal lands to conserve, improve, and sustain natural resources. The following functions support the mission.

(a) NRCS facilitates and provides conservation technical assistance at the local level that helps people assess their natural resource conditions and needs, set goals, identify programs and other resources to address those needs, develop proposals and recommendations, implement solutions, and measure their success. The agency's role is to assist with:

- (1) Resource inventories,
- (2) Resource assessments,
- (3) Planning assistance, and/or
- (4) Technical assistance.

(b) NRCS provides technical assistance through local conservation districts to land users, communities, watershed groups, Federal and State agencies, other partners, and customers.

(c) NRCS provides assistance on a voluntary basis.

(d) The agency's work focuses on soil, water, air, plant, and animal conservation including erosion reduction, water